

2008 Farm Bill

EQIP and Organic Agriculture



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

OVERVIEW

Organic farming is one of the fastest growing segments in U.S. agriculture. From 1992 through 2005, the acres of certified organic cropland rose from 403,000 to more than 1.7 million; organically certified pasture acres rose from 532,000 to over 4 million; and the total number of organic certified livestock rose from 11,000 in 1992 to over 196,000.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) highlights the availability of financial and technical assistance to help producers of all commodities, including organic farming, meet their conservation goals.

CONSERVATION PLANNING

For more than 70 years the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS—formerly the Soil Conservation Service) has placed a high priority on helping agricultural producers meet their environmental and economic goals, while concurrently protecting soil, water, air, and wildlife resources.

NRCS conservationists work with farmers to develop conservation plans based on scientifically-

sound alternatives for accomplishing their goals and working out a timeline to implement the conservation practices in the plan.

NRCS assistance is available at no charge. All information provided to NRCS for conservation planning purposes is **strictly confidential**.

Implementation of conservation plans may be partially funded through Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP FOR ORGANIC TRANSITION AND MORE

EQIP provides payments for farmers to implement conservation practices on working lands. Practices that are already in place on the land are not eligible for payment.

Farmers who want to apply for financial assistance to transition to organic agriculture may receive assistance under a new provision of the EQIP program that allows producers to apply for up to \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 over six years. Producers who are currently certified as organic are also eligible for EQIP under the general provisions.

Organic producers are required to develop and carry out an Organic System Plan (OSP) that is approved by a certifying agent. Indiana applicants will need to include their OSP as part of their EQIP application. An NRCS conservationist will then develop a conservation plan that is consistent with the OSP.

EQIP is a competitive program (one out of every two to three applications is funded on the average) and projects are ranked for environmental benefits; producers addressing more resource concerns for the lowest cost have a higher chance of receiving funds.

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Practice Guideline 2009 EQIP NRCS, Indiana

Conservation Crop Rotation (328) Transition to Organic Certification

This conservation crop rotation payment assists producers in transition to organic certification during the three-year period when land must be farmed organically but is not yet certified organic. This payment is for producers of fruit, nut, vegetable, and other intensively farmed field crops where a change in rotation will occur. A currently certified producer may use this practice to bring currently non-certified acres into certification.

The producer must follow a USDA certified Organic System Plan (OSP) approved by a recognized certifying agent, and will submit this complete OSP to NRCS prior to preparation of the conservation plan and EQIP contract. A certifying agent list is available at:

**[http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/
CertifyingAgents/Accredited.html](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/CertifyingAgents/Accredited.html)**

When requested, the producer will provide records documenting farming activities scheduled in the plan to NRCS for review. The producer needs to retain the records for a minimum of five years. NRCS will not need to retain these records.

Payment is limited during the three-year transition period. If an enrolled field has already completed one or more years of the three-year transition period, those years are not eligible for payment.



EQIP (continued)

Funding is available for a large number of conservation practices for organic producers using EQIP including:

- cover crops,
- crop rotation,
- integrated pest management,
- wind breaks,
- filter strips,
- fence,
- livestock water sources,
- rotational grazing,
- and more!

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

While most EQIP contracts pay producers 50 percent of the cost of structures or management, some producers may receive a larger percentage. Beginning farmers (those who have farmed fewer than 10 years) and producers with limited financial resources (defined on a county by county basis) can receive up to 75 percent of the costs of conservation practices.

Go to <http://www.lrfstool.sc.egov.usda.gov/> for an online limited resource farmer self-determination tool.

STEPS TO TAKE

- Visit the NRCS office at your local USDA Service Center to discuss resource concerns and develop a conservation plan.
- If you don't have a tract number or farm number, contact the Farm Service Agency office at your local USDA Service Center to make an appointment to establish eligibility for USDA programs. (Specific documentation will be required.)

Find local USDA Service Center locations at:
<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>

MORE INFORMATION

For more information and updates about EQIP and other Farm Bill topics, visit the USDA Web site:
<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

or the Indiana NRCS Web site:
<http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/programs>